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Focus- introduction

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Focus

This special issue is devoted to comparative regional integration studies. The *raison d'être* is that if one would like to get close to a theory of regional integration, one has to look not only at one case but at as many as possible; one has to compare. Aristotle already said it in his *Politics* (as far back as 330 BC). And concerning Regional Integration (RI) this insight is not new either; Ernst Haas and Philippe Schmitter set up a framework for comparison of integration schemes in 1964 in their article, "Economics and Differential Patterns of Political Integration: Projections About Unity in Latin America", on International Organization. Since the end of the 1990s the interest for comparative RI has reemerged. In 1999 Walter Mattli published his book *The Logic of Regional Integration: Europe and Beyond*. At the same time as Mattli, Björn Hettne and later Frederik Söderbaum approached RI under the headline 'new regionalism' in a series of articles and books, and since 2003, Finn Laursen has tried to create what really has been missing—continuity in research into RI through a number of workshops. Other attempts to achieve the same continuity have been made in a more institutionalized form since 2001 by the United Nations University Centre for Comparative Integration Studies in Bruges, headed by Luk Van Langenhove and at a more modest level, the group around the Centre for Comparative Integration Studies (CCIS) at Aalborg University since 2005. The latest branch on the tree is the cooperation between Beijing Normal University and CCIS and their joint attempts to investigate RI with an emphasis on Asia. The majority of papers in this issue are offsprings of a joint workshop held in Beijing in October 2009, and those will be published in Chinese in a volume edited by Shengjun Zhang at a later stage. Thus comparative RI is gaining momentum these years. The joint workshop in Beijing, organized by Shengjun Zhang, had as its overall topic 'Regional Integration in a Political and Business Perspective'. By choosing the topic 'political and business perspective' the Joint Beijing Workshop intended to imply that RI is as much economic as political and that it often turns 'real' at the business level since national economies in all parts of the world, including Asia, have benefited from greater RI.

This special issue of *The IUP Journal of International Relations* contains seven papers. As the venue was Beijing it comes as no surprise that several of the papers touch upon Asia, especially China.

The first two papers are of a general character. In the paper, "Regional Integration: Bringing the Classical Theories Back In?", Søren Dosenrode argues the necessity of working towards a general theory of RI. A starting point for this could be to examine the classical RI theories like federalism and neofunctionalism. These two theories are presented, before they are applied to two cases: The United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria and the Mercosur. The tentative result of the analysis is that the two theories

shed light on what had happened in the Middle East and Latin America and why. Also they indicated the obstacles to further RI. Altogether the two analyses indicated that the dismissal of federalism and neofunctionalism has been premature. In the paper, "Regional Formations and Global Governance of Social Policy", Luk Van Langenhove and Maria Cristina Macovei argue that we are witnessing a transformation from a world of states to a world of states and regions thus increasing complexity. They identify three variations of regional integration (one only aiming at removing obstacles to trade; one aiming at building institutions and creating regulatory regimes; and one aiming at creating an identity and actorness). Then they analyze the consequences of these three variations.

Following the first two papers there comes a section of papers related to Asia. In the paper, "China and Regional Integration: From Bilateralism to Regional-Multilateralism", Xinning Song analyzes the change of the traditional Chinese foreign policy from bilateralism towards multilateralism during the 1990s. Today China's Asian regional integration focuses on economics. The basic argument for enhancing the regional economic cooperation with East Asia countries should be a kind of functional approach. Xinning Song sets up a scenario leading from three 10+1 FTAs via a Northeast Asia FTA through three bilateral FTAs to transfer ASEAN+1 one into a real 10+3 as a group, i.e., East Asia Free Trade Area (EAFTA). In the paper, "Economic Collaboration and Regional Integration in Transnational Companies' Strategic Perspective", Olav Jull Sørensen focuses on the impact of Asian and Chinese growth on the EU on the one hand, and on the role of Transnational Companies as drivers of regional integration in Asia on the other. After having analyzed three scenarios, he concludes that Asia is a winner but also that it is not an 'Asia takes it all situation'.

Steen Fryba Christensen and Li Xing in the paper, "Regional Integration/Cooperation in Brazil's and China's Development and International Political Strategies", compare Brazil and China's regional integration/cooperation strategies. Both the states are rising global powers and both have high impact on their respective regions. The views taken in the analysis is not that regional integration is important in itself, instead, their analysis seeks to explain the kind of regionalism promoted by Brazil and China in their respective role in shaping and directing regional integration/cooperation. After a thorough analysis, the authors conclude the growing economic weight, particularly of China, but also of Brazil and other big emerging economies combined with the results of the crisis suffered by the US. This article is a bridge to the last section of papers where regional integration is analyzed outside Asia.

Wolfgang Zank in the paper, "The Dynamics of Overlapping 'Shallow' and 'Deep' Economic Integration: Greater Arab Free Trade Area and European Neighborhood Policy in the Mediterranean", analyzes overlapping integration in the Mediterranean Basin—the project of a Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) and a process of

economic integration of EU neighbors into EU's Internal Market. In spite of the rhetoric about Pan-Arabism, the results of Arab integration has been very limited. Also the GAFTA launched in 1997, has not added depth to Arab integration endeavored. Contrary to this, Zank concludes that the EU's policy towards its neighboring countries has achieved this, at least partly.

Gerrit Olivier analyzes the state of African integration in the paper, "Integrative Cooperation in Africa". He starts out the main analysis by stipulating Africa's desperate need for integration as a way to solve poverty. Thereafter he outlines the main problems of African unification, pointing to nationalism and state-centredness, namely that most African leaders live comfortably with two identities: one in which they praise and long for African unity and solidarity and one of exclusive state-centrism.

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